

(See introduction to the section on material recording, scheduling, dispatching, and distributing occupations for information on working conditions, training requirements, and earnings.)

Office and Administrative Support Worker Supervisors and Managers

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Significant Points

- Most jobs are filled by promoting individuals from within the organization, very often from the ranks of clerks whom they will subsequently supervise.
- Office automation will cause employment in some office and administrative support occupations to slow or even decline, but supervisors are more likely to retain their jobs because of their relatively higher skills and longer tenure.
- Applicants for office and administrative support supervisor or manager jobs are likely to encounter keen competition because their number should greatly exceed the number of job openings.

Nature of the Work

All organizations need timely and effective office and administrative support to operate efficiently. *Office and administrative support supervisors and managers* coordinate this support. These workers are employed in virtually every sector of the economy, working in positions as varied as *customer services manager, teller supervisor, and shipping-and-receiving supervisor*.

Although specific functions of office and administrative support supervisors and managers vary considerably, they share many common duties. For example, supervisors perform administrative tasks to ensure that their staffs can work efficiently. Equipment and machinery used in their departments must be in good working order. If the computer system goes down or a facsimile machine malfunctions, they must try to correct the problem or alert repair personnel. They also request new equipment or supplies for their department when necessary.

Planning the work of their staff and supervising them are key functions of this job. To do these effectively, the supervisor must know the strengths and weaknesses of each member of the staff, as well as the required level of quality and time allotted to each job. They must make allowances for unexpected absences and other disruptions by adjusting assignments or performing the work themselves if the situation requires it.

After allocating work assignments and issuing deadlines, office and administrative support supervisors and managers oversee the work to ensure that it is proceeding on schedule and meets established quality standards. This may involve reviewing each person's work on a computer—as in the case of accounting clerks—or listening to how they deal with customers—as in the case of customer services representatives. When supervising long-term projects, the supervisor may meet regularly with staff members to discuss their progress.

Office and administrative support supervisors and managers also evaluate each worker's performance. If a worker has done a good job, the supervisor records it in the employee's personnel file and may recommend a promotion or other award. Alternatively, if a worker is performing poorly, the supervisor discusses the problem

with the employee to determine the cause and helps the worker improve his or her performance. This might require sending the employee to a training course or arranging personal counseling. If the situation does not improve, the supervisor may recommend a transfer, demotion, or dismissal.

Office and administrative support supervisors and managers usually interview and evaluate prospective clerical employees. When new workers arrive on the job, supervisors greet them and provide orientation to acquaint them with the organization and its operating routines. Some supervisors may be actively involved in recruiting new workers, for example, by making presentations at high schools and business colleges. They may also serve as the primary liaisons between their offices and the general public through direct contact and by preparing promotional information.

Supervisors also help train new employees in organization and office procedures. They may teach new employees how to use the telephone system and operate office equipment. Because much clerical work is computerized, they must also teach new employees to use the organization's computer system. When new office equipment or updated computer software is introduced, supervisors retrain experienced employees in using it efficiently. If this is not possible, they may arrange for special outside training for their employees.

Office and administrative support supervisors and managers often act as liaisons between the clerical staff and the professional, technical, and managerial staff. This may involve implementing new



Planning work and supervising staff are key functions of office and administrative support worker supervisors and managers.

company policies or restructuring the workflow in their departments. They must also keep their superiors informed of their progress and abreast of any potential problems. Often this communication takes the form of research projects and progress reports. Because they have access to information such as their department's performance records, they may compile and present these data for use in planning or designing new policies.

Office and administrative support supervisors and managers also may have to resolve interpersonal conflicts among the staff. In organizations covered by union contracts, supervisors must know the provisions of labor-management agreements and run their departments accordingly. They may meet with union representatives to discuss work problems or grievances.

Working Conditions

Office and administrative support supervisors and managers are employed in a wide variety of work settings, but most work in clean, well lit, offices that usually are comfortable.

Most work a standard 40-hour week. Because some organizations operate around the clock, office and administrative support supervisors and managers may have to work nights, weekends, and holidays. Sometimes supervisors rotate among the three shifts; in other cases, shifts are assigned on the basis of seniority.

Employment

Office and administrative support supervisors and managers held almost 1.4 million jobs in 2000. Although jobs for office and administrative support supervisors and managers are found in practically every industry, the largest number are found in organizations with a large clerical workforce such as banks, wholesalers, government agencies, retail establishments, business service firms, healthcare facilities, schools, and insurance companies. Because of most organizations' need for continuity of supervision, few office and administrative support supervisors and managers work on a temporary or part-time basis.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most firms fill office and administrative support supervisory and managerial positions by promoting clerical or administrative support workers from within their organizations. To become eligible for promotion to a supervisory position, clerical or administrative support workers must prove they are capable of handling additional responsibilities. When evaluating candidates, superiors look for strong teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, and communication skills, as well as determination, loyalty, poise, and confidence. They also look for more specific supervisory attributes, such as the ability to organize and coordinate work efficiently, to set priorities, and to motivate others. Increasingly, supervisors need a broad base of office skills coupled with personal flexibility to adapt to changes in organizational structure and move among departments when necessary.

In addition, supervisors must pay close attention to detail in order to identify and correct errors made by the staff they oversee. Good working knowledge of the organization's computer system is also an advantage. Many employers require postsecondary training—in some cases, an associate's or even a bachelor's degree.

A clerk with potential supervisory abilities may be given occasional supervisory assignments. To prepare for full-time supervisory duties, he or she may attend in-house training or take courses in time management or interpersonal relations.

Some office and administrative support supervisor positions are filled with people from outside the organization. These positions may serve as entry-level training for potential higher level managers.

New college graduates may rotate through departments of an organization at this level to learn the work of the organization.

Job Outlook

Like other supervisory occupations, applicants for jobs as office and administrative support supervisors or managers are likely to encounter keen competition because the number of applicants should greatly exceed the number of job openings. Employment is expected to grow more slowly than the average for all occupations through 2010. In addition to the job openings arising from growth, a larger number of openings will stem from the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations or leave this large occupation for other reasons.

Employment of office and administrative support supervisors and managers is largely affected by the demand for administrative support workers. The continuing increase in office automation due to new technology should increase support workers' productivity and allow a wider variety of tasks to be performed by more people in professional positions, requiring fewer office and administrative support workers. The result will be to cause employment growth in some clerical occupations to slow or even decline. Supervisors will direct smaller permanent staffs—supplemented by increased use of temporary clerical staff—and perform more professional tasks. Office and administrative support managers will coordinate the increasing amount of administrative work and make sure the technology is applied and running properly. However, organizational restructuring should continue to reduce some manager positions, distributing more responsibility to office and administrative support supervisors.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of office and administrative support supervisors and managers were \$36,420 in 2000; the middle 50 percent earned between \$28,090 and \$47,350. The lowest paid 10 percent earned less than \$22,070, while the highest paid 10 percent earned more than \$60,600. In 2000, median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of office and administrative support supervisors and managers were:

Federal Government	\$48,870
State government	40,050
Local government	38,450
Offices and clinics of medical doctors	35,140
Commercial banks	34,240
Department stores	20,370

In addition to typical benefits, some office and administrative support supervisors and managers in the private sector may receive additional compensation in the form of bonuses and stock options.

Related Occupations

Office and administrative support supervisors and managers must understand and sometimes perform the work of those whom they oversee, including bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks; cashiers; communications equipment operators; customer service representatives; data entry and information processing workers; general office clerks; receptionists and information clerks; stock clerks and order fillers; and tellers. Their supervisory and administrative duties are similar to those of other supervisors and managers.

Sources of Additional Information

For a wide variety of information related to management occupations, including educational programs, contact:

► American Management Association, 1601 Broadway, New York, NY 10019-7420. Internet: <http://www.amanet.org>

- National Management Association, 2210 Arbor Blvd., Dayton, OH 45439. Internet: <http://www.nma1.org>
- Association of Records Managers and Administrators, 4200 Somerset Dr., Suite 215, Prairie Village, KS 66208-0540. Internet: <http://www.arma.org>
- International Association of Administrative Professionals, 10502 NW Ambassador Dr., P.O. Box 20404, Kansas City, MO 64195-0404. Internet: <http://www.iaap-hq.org>

Office Clerks, General

(O*NET 43-9061.00)

Significant Points

- Although most jobs are entry level, applicants with previous office experience, computer skills, and sound communication abilities may have an advantage.
- Plentiful job opportunities will stem from employment growth, the large size of the occupation, and high replacement needs.

Nature of the Work

Rather than performing a single specialized task, the daily responsibilities of general office clerks change with the needs of the specific job and the employer. Whereas some clerks spend their days filing or typing, others enter data at a computer terminal. They can also be called upon to operate photocopiers, fax machines, and other office equipment; prepare mailings; proofread copies; and answer telephones and deliver messages.

The specific duties assigned to a clerk vary significantly, depending upon the type of office in which a clerk works. An office clerk in a doctor's office, for example, would not perform the same tasks as a clerk in a large financial institution or in the office of an auto-parts wholesaler. Although they may sort checks, keep payroll records, take inventory, and access information, clerks also perform duties unique to their employer, such as organizing medications, making transparencies for a presentation, or filling orders received by fax machine.

The specific duties assigned to a clerk also vary by level of experience. Whereas inexperienced employees make photocopies, stuff envelopes, or record inquiries, experienced clerks usually are given additional responsibilities. For example, they may maintain financial or other records, set up spreadsheets, verify statistical

reports for accuracy and completeness, handle and adjust customer complaints, work with vendors, make travel arrangements, take inventory of equipment and supplies, answer questions on departmental services and functions, or help prepare invoices or budgetary requests. Senior office clerks may be expected to monitor and direct the work of lower level clerks.

Working Conditions

For the most part, general office clerks work in comfortable office settings. Those on full-time schedules usually work a standard 40-hour week; however, some work shifts or overtime during busy periods. About 1 in 4 clerks work part time, and about 1 in 10 work on a temporary basis.

Employment

General office clerks held about 2.7 million jobs in 2000. Most are employed in relatively small businesses. Although they work in every sector of the economy, more than 60 percent worked in the services or wholesale and retail trade industries.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Although most office clerk jobs are entry-level administrative support positions, some previous office or business experience may be needed. Employers usually require a high school diploma, and some require typing, basic computer skills, and other general office skills. Familiarity with computer word-processing software and applications is becoming increasingly important.

Training for this occupation is available through business education programs offered in high schools, community and junior colleges, and postsecondary vocational schools. Courses in word processing, other computer applications, and office practices are particularly helpful.

Because general office clerks usually work with other office staff, they should be cooperative and able to work as part of a team. Employers prefer individuals who are able to perform a variety of tasks and satisfy the needs of the many departments within a company. In addition, applicants should have good communication skills, be detail-oriented, and adaptable.

General office clerks who exhibit strong communication, interpersonal, and analytical skills may be promoted to supervisory positions. Others may move into different, more senior clerical or administrative jobs, such as receptionist, secretary, or administrative assistant. After gaining some work experience or specialized skills, many workers transfer to jobs with higher pay or greater advancement potential. Advancement to professional occupations within an establishment normally requires additional formal education, such as a college degree.

Job Outlook

Employment of general office clerks is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2010. Employment growth, the large size of the occupation, and high replacement needs should result in plentiful job opportunities for general office clerks in many industries. Furthermore, growth in part-time and temporary clerical positions will lead to a large number of job openings. Prospects should be brightest for those who have knowledge of basic computer applications and office machinery, such as fax machines and copiers. Job opportunities will also be most favorable for those with good writing and communication skills. As general clerical duties continue to be consolidated and the ability to perform multiple tasks becomes increasingly necessary, employers will seek well-rounded individuals with highly developed communication skills.



Office clerks usually work in a comfortable office setting.